

Enforcing Heterosexuality: Adapting Lillian Hellman's 'The Children's Hour' for the screen

William Glass

SUMMARY : Zgodnie z Kodeksem Haysa z 1930 roku zakazane zostało ukazywanie wątków homoseksualnych na ekranach kin. Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje dwa filmy jako studium wpływu Kodeksu na przedstawianie homoseksualności w Hollywood. Zarówno *These Three* (1936), jak i *The Children's Hour* (1961) to adaptacje sztuki Lillian Hellman, opowiadającej o złamanym życiu dwóch nauczycielek pomówionych o lesbianizm. W przypadku pierwszego filmu, wpływ Kodeksu był absolutny. PCA nakazało przemilczeć wątki lesbijskie. W latach 60tych natomiast PCA złagodziło zakaz, film mógł zatem zachować lesbijski charakter sztuki. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu dowieść, że Kodeks Haysa był hollywoodzkim narzędziem wymuszania heteronormatywności oraz że konieczność utrzymania heteroseksualności jako społecznej normy nieustannie determinowała (fałszywe) przedstawienia życia osób homoseksualnych, nawet podczas malejącego znaczenia Kodeksu.

The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930 was Hollywood's effort at self-censorship. Its purpose was to forestall governmental attempts to control the content of movies. Ineffective and largely ignored in its first few years of existence, the Code grew teeth when film producers hired Joseph Breen in 1934 to head the Production Code Administration (PCA). The Code had an elaborate justification for its restrictions and contained detailed descriptions of what was and was not appropriate content for movies. It also prescribed the suitable methods for the depiction of adult topics. One terse sentence banned homosexuality from the screen: "SEX PERVERSION or any inference to it is forbidden." [1] As Vito Russo demonstrated in *The Celluloid Closet*, film makers, actors, and actresses found ways to slip past Breen and his office coded references to gay and lesbian issues (Vito Russo, 1987, 62-123, passim), but the PCA was effective in keeping direct and open portrayal of homosexuality out of Hollywood's movies, even when the film's source in a play or novel or history had queer content.

While many films could be used to illustrate the Code's impact on Hollywood's portrayal of homosexuality, two in particular provide the basis for a good case study. Both *These Three* (1936) and *The Children's Hour* (1961) were adaptations of Lillian Hellman's play, *The Children's Hour*. In the play, two single female teachers have

their lives ruined by the spiteful lies of a disgruntled student that the women were lesbians. Both film versions had adaptations by Hellman and direction by William Wyler.

Will Glass